

THE ROOM BEYOND TIME.



The room wasn't supposed to exist. It wasn't a place you'd find on any map, not a place that belonged to this world—or any other. And yet, here it was: a simple room with walls that seemed to hum softly, as if alive with the whispers of countless untold stories. In the center sat a single wooden table, worn but sturdy, and two mismatched chairs, one slightly too large, the other slightly too small. The man entered first, his boots scuffing the floor. He paused, his hand resting on the back of the chair, eyes scanning the room. He had been through a lot of rooms in his life—war rooms, interrogation rooms, hospital rooms, briefing rooms and empty rooms—but none like this. There was something about this place, something that tugged at the edges of memory he couldn't quite place. Then the boy walked in. He froze in the doorway, his small face a mixture of confusion and defiance. He was thin, with wide eyes that darted around the room like a cornered animal. One hand gripped a battered GI Joe toy, its plastic paint worn smooth from endless battles waged in the solitude of a foster home. Their eyes met, and for a moment, the world seemed to hold its breath. "Who are you?" the boy demanded, his voice small but sharp. The man swallowed hard. "I could ask you the same thing." The boy took a step closer, his gaze narrowing. "You look like me. But bigger. Older." The man let out a soft, shaky laugh. "Yeah. You look like me too. Just... smaller." They stared at each other, the silence thick and heavy. Then, almost as if pulled by invisible strings, they both moved to the table and sat down. For a while, neither spoke. The boy fidgeted with his GI Joe, his legs swinging under the chair. The man rested his elbows on the table, his hands clasped tightly together. Finally, the boy broke the silence. "Are you me? From the future?" The man nodded slowly. "Yeah. I guess I am." The boy frowned, his small brow furrowing. "You're... big. And tired-looking." The man smiled faintly, though it didn't quite reach his eyes. "Life does that to you sometimes." The boy tilted his head, curiosity flickering in his gaze. "Is it hard?" The man exhaled deeply, running a hand through his hair. "Yeah, kid. It's hard. But it's worth it." The boy leaned forward, his eyes searching the man's face. "Do I make it?" The man's voice was steady, but his eyes shimmered. "You do more than make it. You fight. You survive. And you become someone you can be proud of." The boy's grip tightened on the GI Joe. "But I'm so tired already. How do I keep going?" The man reached across the table, his large, calloused hand resting gently over the boy's small one. "Because you don't quit. Not ever. Even when it feels like you're alone. Even when it hurts. You keep going. And one day, you'll look back and see how strong you really are." The boy's lips trembled, his tough facade cracking just enough for a tear to slip free. "But I'm scared. I'm so scared all the time." The man's voice softened, filled with a tenderness he rarely showed. "I know. I was too. But fear doesn't make you weak. It makes you human. And it's okay to feel it. Just don't let it stop you." The boy sniffled, wiping his nose on his sleeve. "Do I ever find someone who stays?" The man hesitated, the weight of the question pressing down on him. "You find people who matter. People who choose you. And you learn to choose yourself too. That's the most important thing." The boy stared at him for a long moment, then nodded slowly. "What about love? Does it stop hurting?" The man smiled, this time a real one. "It doesn't stop hurting. But you learn to carry it. And one day, you'll find someone who makes the pain worth it." They sat in silence again, the boy tracing the grain of the table, the man watching him with quiet pride. Finally, the boy stood, his small frame trembling slightly. He walked around the table and stopped in front of the man. "You're really me?" he asked one last time. The man nodded. "Yeah, kid. I'm you." The boy hesitated, then thrust the GI Joe into the man's hands. "Here. You'll need him more than me now." The man chuckled softly, taking the toy with a reverence that surprised even himself. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a small, weathered key. The word "TIME" was engraved on one side, "HOPE" on the other. "And this," the man said, placing the key in the boy's palm, "is for you. You'll know what it means when you need it most." The boy stared at the key, then at the man. A tear slipped down his cheek, mirrored by one slipping down the man's. Without a word, the man pulled the boy into a hug. The boy stiffened at first, then melted into the embrace, his small arms wrapping tightly around the man's neck. And in that moment, as I watched from my corner of the room, I saw something I never thought I'd see: healing. Not from outside forces or distant promises, but from within. When they pulled apart, the room began to fade, the light growing warmer, softer. The boy and the man turned to look at me, their expressions filled with quiet understanding. And as they dissolved into the light, I finally understood: I was always enough. I didn't need to keep running or fighting. I had everything I needed all along—the strength of the man, the resilience of the boy, and the courage to bring them together. Now, it's time to live. To love. To be whole.

WRITTEN BY

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